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AUTHOR Roberts, Patty; Anderson, Janet; Yanish, Paula
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between demographic variables and academic misconduct (cheating) among undergraduate students at a mid-sized, four-year public university. A total of 422 students from 22 classes completed a 27-item self-report measure assessing their involvement in 17 types of academic misconduct. In addition, the measure requested demographic information, such as class standing, age, gender, GPA, and academic college major. Of the students sampled, 91.7 percent reported engaging in at least one type of academic misconduct behavior during the surveyed school year. Thirty-six students reported they had never cheated; 33 reported engaging in only one behavior just one time. Results of chi-square analysis revealed that being male and/or younger than 24 years of age were characteristics associated with greater involvement in academic misconduct. The greatest amount of collaboration was reported by business students, while the least amount was reported by students in the performing and visual arts. Conversely, performing and visual arts majors reported the highest incidence of making up excuses to avoid handing in a term paper or taking a test on time. Five tables showing item-by-item analyses of survey responses are appended. (Contains 24 references.) (WD)

Running head: ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic Misconduct:

Where Do We Start?

Patty Roberts, Janet Anderson, and Paula Yanish

Doctoral Students

University of Northern Colorado

Abstract

This study identified the academic misconduct behaviors engaged in by a representative sample of undergraduate students at a mid-sized public university. Results are being used to build a collaborative process between faculty and student affairs personnel toward the common goal of decreasing academic misconduct.

Academic Misconduct:

Where Do We Start?

Institutions of higher education have come under fire recently for alleged increases in student academic misconduct. Headlines report students violating honor codes, cheating on exams, falsifying information in papers, and plagiarizing papers. The public, outraged by this type of behavior, is calling for reform in higher education. Student academic dishonesty has "...contribute[d] to this erosion of confidence and public support" (Kibler, Nuss, Paterson, & Pavela, 1988, p. 2).

Studies examining the amount of student academic dishonesty have reported varying percentages of students who cheat. Scheers and Dayton (1987) found that 87% of students in their study had cheated at least once. In their literature review, Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor (1992) reported student cheating behavior of anywhere from 23% to 88%. Genereux and McLeod (1995) found that over 80% of students have cheated. In a ten-year follow-up study of cheating, Diekhoff, LaBeff, Clark, Williams, Francis & Haines (1996), found a significant increase in overall cheating from 54.1% in 1984 to 61.2% in 1994. "Almost all researchers agree that academic dishonesty is widespread, with the majority of college students having engaged in cheating at least once" (Diekhoff et al., p. 488).

There is a significant body of research which has examined different causes and motivations for engaging in cheating behaviors. One specific area which has been written about extensively is academic misconduct in relation to levels of moral and student development (Johnson, 1991; Kibler, 1993a; Kibler, 1993b; Kohlberg, 1978; Nucci & Pascarella, 1987; and Rest, 1988). Other studies have focused on influences of social and environmental factors (Bonjean & McGee. 1965; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; and Payne & Nantz, 1994). While

factors which may predict student academic misconduct vary across studies, patterns appear to exist which may assist academic and student affairs administrators in dealing with this problem. Students who report they have cheated at least once while in college appear to be younger (Bowers, 1964; Davis et al., 1992; Diekhoff et al., 1996; Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, & Clark, 1986; Lipson & McGavern, 1993; and Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, & Armstead, 1996), male (Davis et al., 1992; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; and Newstead et al., 1996), single (Diekhoff et al., 1996; Haines et al., 1986), have a lower grade point average (Bowers, 1964; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Haines et al., 1986; and Lipson & McGavern, 1993), and not as mature or dedicated to the integrity of higher education as noncheaters (Diekhoff et al., 1996). One must be cautious in making generalizations, however, regarding the above-mentioned characteristics.

Studies do exist (albeit a very few) which either disagree with the above-mentioned findings or which have produced insignificant results. These include Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995), who found no gender differences in cheating, and Leming (1980), who found that women cheated more than men in certain situations. Additionally, Newstead et al. (1996) and Lipson and McGavern (1993) found no significant difference between levels of class standing and self-reported cheating behavior.

Academic major has been examined in a few studies, and findings are varied in this area. Bowers (1964) found that business and engineering students cheated most often; education, social science, and science were in the middle; and arts and humanities students cheated the least often. Newstead et al. (1996) reported slightly different findings. "...[C]heating of all kinds is most commonly reported in the areas of science and technology, least often in professional studies such as health and social work and in the humanities" (p. 239).

Academic dishonesty is a serious problem in higher education and individual institutions must be aware of the cheating behaviors occurring on their campuses if they wish to address the problem. As mentioned previously, studies have found that the majority of students have cheated at least once during their college career. These students tend to be younger, male, single, and have a lower GPA. Studies show differing results in regard to academic major; more research is needed in this area.

This descriptive study was completed to determine the level and types of students' self-reported academic misconduct at one institution. The data will be used by a joint committee of student affairs and academic affairs administrators and faculty to formulate methods for addressing academic misconduct.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between demographic variables and academic misconduct among undergraduate students at a mid-sized, four-year public institution in the West.

The five independent variables chosen for this study were gender, class standing, age, academic college, and grade point average (GPA). An examination of these demographic variables was important to identify whether or not homogeneous groups of students engage in specific behaviors, as such a finding would suggest particular intervention approaches. The dependent variable was defined as student academic misconduct. This variable included plagiarism, cheating, and fabrication of material.

Research Questions

This study measured the levels of self-reported academic misconduct behaviors and described these types of behaviors for undergraduate students at one institution. The main

research question was: What is the extent of self-reported academic misconduct? The following five sub-questions were also posed:

1. Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between female and male students?

2. Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students?

3. Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between students' reported academic colleges?

4. Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between students with different GPA's?

5. Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between younger and older students?

Limitations of the Study

The stratified random sampling method of selecting classes to survey, as well as the instructors' willingness to give up class time to participate in this study, may have decreased the generalizability of this study to all undergraduate students at this institution. Student absenteeism or unwillingness to participate decreased the sample size and, therefore, may have affected the results. Additionally, the volunteer characteristics of those who completed the survey may have based the sample and affected the results (see Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996, for more information on the characteristics of research volunteers).

The researchers anticipated underreporting of academic misconduct because of the self-report style of the survey instrument. Scheers and Dayton (1987) state that underreporting is a

major issue with anonymous self-reporting surveys. Using a different technique may increase accurate reporting; however, an anonymous, self-report survey was developed in the design of this study due to time constraints.

Methodology

Sample

A stratified random sampling technique selected courses whose students resembled a cross-section of the student population on selected demographic characteristics. The selected sample was comprised of 22 classes with a total enrollment of 809 undergraduate students.

Instrument

A twenty-seven item self-report survey design was chosen based upon its ease of implementation, cost effectiveness, and time efficiency. Survey items were modeled after those used by Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes and Armstead (1996), and exemplified various forms of academic misconduct identified in the student handbook at the institution studied. Seventeen items describing academic misconduct behaviors consisted of responses of "Never", "Once", "2 - 4 times", "5 - 7 times", and "8 or more times". The remaining ten items requested demographic information, such as class standing, age, gender, GPA, and academic college major. A pilot study of the instrument was conducted with a cross-section of 29 students and appropriate changes were made to increase the clarity of some items.

Procedures

With the assistance of a student affairs administrator, faculty members of the selected classes were initially contacted through letters enlisting their support and cooperation in the study. The surveys were administered by the researchers during classes in the Spring of 1997.

No identifying information was included on the survey response form, assuring anonymity for respondents.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to initially evaluate the data. Chi-square (Pearson's) comparisons were used to look for significant misconduct behaviors in relation to each independent variable. An alpha level of .05 was used for all data analysis procedures. Missing data on some of the 447 surveys accounted for different "n's" in the data analysis.

Results

Five of the classes in the selected sample were not in session during the period of data collection, reducing the total number from 22 to 17. This circumstance, in addition to absenteeism from classes, resulted in 447 out of a possible 809 students completing the survey. Overall results were based on 422 usable answer sheets. Reliability of the instrument, based on the 17 survey items, was found to be .85 (Cronbach's Alpha).

The overall extent of academic misconduct is shown in Table 1, which ranks the misconduct behaviors from those done the most to those done the least. The number and percentage of students in the total sample who reported having done each behavior during the 1996-1997 school year is also given. Of the students sampled, 91.7% reported they had engaged in at least one type of academic misconduct behavior during the surveyed school year. Thirty-six students reported they had never cheated; 33 reported engaging in only one behavior just one time.

[Table 1]

Chi-Square

Data were examined in relation to each of the five dependent response categories (frequency of engaging in academic misconduct behaviors) and each of the independent variables (gender, classification, college, GPA, and age). Because of the generation of invalid chi-square tests (i.e., cell frequency less than 5), all response categories were collapsed to two dimensions: either a student reported never engaging in academic misconduct behavior or a student reported engaging in one or more of the behaviors one or more times during the academic year in which the survey was administered.

Chi-squares were significant for a different set of questions for each variable. The following tables illustrate this information in relation to each of the research questions.

Research Question #1 - **Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between female and male students?** Table 2 shows how males and females responded to survey items where significant differences were found.

Gender. For every question on the survey, including those without a significant chi-square, males reported more academic misconduct than females.

[Table 2]

Research Question #2 - **Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students?** Table 3 shows the survey items where significant chi-squares occurred in relation to class standing.

Classification. There was no consistency or clear pattern in terms of one class having the highest percentage of academic misconduct on every question, nor were the classes always in the same order by frequency. For example, seniors may have engaged in the second highest percentage of misconduct on one item, and the third or fourth highest on other items.

[Table 3]

Research Question #3 - **Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between academic colleges?** The figures for different majors are shown in Table 4.

Major. The greatest amount of collaboration was reported by Business students, while the least amount was reported by students in Performing and Visual Arts. Conversely, Performing and Visual Arts majors reported the highest incidence of making up excuses to avoid handing in a term paper or taking a test on time.

[Table 4]

Research Question #4 - **Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between students with different GPA's?** No significant chi-squares were found for this variable.

Research Question #5 - **Is there a difference in self-reported academic misconduct behaviors between younger and older students?** Table 5 displays significant chi-square results for this variable.

Age Categories. Students over the age of twenty-five were expected to report the lowest amount of academic misconduct. This was true for only one of the four significant chi-squares for the age variable, and for eight of the 17 items on the survey. Among questions where no significance was found, the over 25 students reported they had recycled term papers at a rate second only to freshmen.

[Table 5]

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency and types of academic misconduct occurring in the undergraduate population at one institution. Most previous studies of academic

misconduct allude to suspected underreporting on self-report questionnaires. The researchers believe underreporting in this study was minimized due to the non-threatening and totally confidential survey administration procedures. Additionally, the student status of the researchers may have been less intimidating than the faculty status of researchers who have conducted similar studies. Another factor which may have positively influenced accurate self-reporting of academic misconduct was faculty encouragement of students in selected classes to participate in the research.

Significant chi-squares were found for four of the five independent variables (gender, classification, major, and age), for specific types of academic misconduct behaviors. These overall findings were anticipated even though there are inconsistent results in the literature from previous research on this topic.

As anticipated, being male and/or younger than 24 years of age are characteristics associated with greater involvement in academic misconduct at the institution studied. Males reported higher levels of academic misconduct than females on every survey item. However, considering the high overall level of academic misconduct, it is clear that significantly decreasing these behaviors will require a much more widespread approach than just targeting the younger male segment of the student population.

Student classification or class standing and age are closely related. Previous research of academic misconduct led the researchers to anticipate academic misconduct would be engaged in at the highest level by the youngest students, and at the lowest level by the oldest students. This general pattern was evident for about one half of the behavioral items on the survey. The category of 18-19 year olds reported the highest percent of academic misconduct for 10 of the 17 behavioral items, followed in descending order by those 20-21 years old, 22-23, 24-25, and the

over 25 year olds. The oldest group did not have the highest percentage on any item; however, this group was the second highest for recycling term papers, writing a paper for another student, and arranging to communicate answers during an exam.

The significant amount of collaboration among students who major in Business may be a reflection of the curriculum. Emphasis on the elements of team work and partnerships is necessary to prepare competitively employable graduates in this field.

Lack of significance between GPA levels may be due to the homogeneity of self-reported GPA's. Forty-three percent of students reported a GPA between 2.0 and 2.99, while 51% reported a GPA between 3.0 and 3.99.

Implications

How do we proceed with making changes which will have an impact on academic misconduct? From a student affairs perspective, if we desire to change students' behavior, we need to move beyond the proscribed role of providing the judgment and punishment for incidences of academic misconduct. These behaviors are brought to our attention often way too late to provide effective intervention or mediation prior to a failing grade being assigned. Haines, Diekhoff, LaBeff, and Clark (1986) suggested that institutions of higher learning will need to determine what factors, if any, and what kinds of college environments can increase the maturity of students (p. 353). They refer to interventions which include discussions of, and role-playing experiences related to, moral dilemmas. In an extensive study conducted by McCabe and Bowers (1994), there was significantly less cheating occurring at schools with honor codes than at noncode schools. Davis et al. (1992) assert that preventive measures serve only as temporary deterrents in specific situations. "Only when students develop a stronger commitment to the

educational process and when they possess or activate an internalized code of ethics that opposes cheating will the problem have been dealt with effectively" (p. 19).

Since many of these behaviors occur inside the classroom or pertain to expectations that students complete certain coursework independently, it is vital to engage faculty in a collaborative effort to respond in a systemic way. Risacher and Slonaker (1996) cite several studies which have reported the preference of faculty to handle incidences of cheating independently without involving the institution in the implementation of established policies. Alschuler and Blimling (1995) write that there are significant disincentives for faculty to enforce academic misconduct policies, including burden of proof, time consuming and adversarial institutional judicial procedures, and exposure to litigation (p. 124). Paradoxically, this individual approach helps to maintain an environment where risk-taking academic behaviors are reinforced. The problem is not one which can be addressed effectively by focusing on individual students and their presumed moral deficiencies; rather, we need to do an appraisal of the "norms, values, and roles of the collegiate culture that support cheating, just as knocking down people is an integral part of football" (Alschuler and Blimling, 1995, p. 123).

Educating faculty in the behaviors occurring at this institution is one step which may help in forging the collaborative relationship needed to bring about observable changes in the institutional culture. Faculty in whose classes the data were collected may form a core group of interested parties willing to participate in the joint planning committee.

The publicity surrounding the preliminary findings and the resultant controversy at the institution studied created an opportunity for dialogues to occur on this topic. The next step in the process will be to form the joint committee of student and academic affairs personnel and faculty to reach consensus on how to utilize the data. With student affairs personnel providing a system-

wide support framework to minimize faculty time spent on administrative procedures, disincentives for reporting individual cases of academic misconduct can be greatly reduced.

Any institution desiring to tackle this problem needs to review its academic misconduct guidelines and involve students in the process of revising them and developing clear explanations of academic misconduct and sanctions.

Conclusions

Student affairs administrators have an opportunity to bridge the separation of academic and student affairs by addressing the issue of academic misconduct. More education and awareness of what constitutes academic misconduct needs to be disseminated and discussed with faculty. Having an impact on academic misconduct will require a long-term commitment to educating and supporting both students and faculty. The best chance for reducing the level of academic misconduct lies in the creation and nurturance of an institutional culture which promotes and supports academic integrity. This institutional culture will enhance the type of environment necessary for higher-level moral decision-making to occur, thus reducing instances of academic misconduct (Kibler et al., 1988).

Recommendations

Further analysis of the data needs to be conducted to assist in developing approaches for assessing the institutional culture and strategies which will provide positive impacts for students. Additional studies of student and faculty attitudes are necessary for developing strategies to initiate organizational changes. Identifying individual faculty members who are supportive of changes in the system, and who are willing to be involved, will be crucial if any substantive changes are to survive beyond a pilot program.

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Table 1

Overall Ranking of Academic Misconduct Behaviors

Type of Misconduct	n	%
1. Worked on homework with others when the instructor expects you to work on your own	236	55.7
2. Copied another student's coursework with his/her knowledge	212	50.0
3. Recycled term papers (use papers you have already completed for a different class)	191	45.0
4. Added a few made-up items to a bibliography	177	41.7
5. Intentionally used someone else's ideas or words as your (plagiarism)	151	35.6
6. Made up an excuse to avoid handing own in a term paper or taking a test on time	138	32.5
7. Faked data on a lab report or project	134	31.6
8. Allowed another student to copy from your exam	123	29.1
9. Copied from another person's paper without his/her knowledge	103	24.3
10. Used illegal cheat sheets/crib sheets for an exam	89	21.0
11. Arranged to sit next to someone in order to copy from his/her exam	80	19.9
12. Purposely put books or journals on the wrong shelf in the library or cut out articles so other students couldn't find them	70	16.5
13. Obtained an unauthorized copy of an exam before taking it	63	14.9
14. Copied another student's homework files from his/her computer disk	50	11.8
15. Written a paper for another student	46	10.8

16. Arranged ahead of time with other students to communicate answers during an exam, even if you don't sit together	40	9.4
17. Had someone else take an exam for you	2	.5

Table 2

Significant chi-squares by gender.

	%	
Survey item	Never	Once or more
Allowed another student to copy from exam.*		
Females	74.90 %	25.10 %
Males	64.88	35.12
Copied from another person's paper *without* his/her knowledge.***		
Females	81. 20	18.80
Males	66.86	33.14
Used illegal crib/cheat sheets for an exam.***		
Females	86.06	13.94
Males	68.05	31.95
Arranged to sit next to someone in order to copy from his/her exam.***		
Females	86.06	13.94
Males	73.37	26.63
Obtained an unauthorized copy of an exam before taking it.**		
Females	89.20	10.80
Males	79.29	20.71
Copied another student's homework files from his/her computer disk.*		
Females	91.24	8.76
Males	83.43	16.57

Arranged ahead of time with other students to communicate answers during an exam, even if you don't sit together.***		
Females	94.42	5.58
Males	85.21	14.79

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Table 3

Significant chi-squares by class standing.

	%	
Survey item	Never	Once or more
Added a few made-up items to a bibliography.*		
Freshmen	46.48 %	53.52 %
Sophomores	54.46	45.54
Juniors	64.76	35.24
Seniors	61.54	38.46
Intentionally used someone else's ideas or words as your own (plagiarism).*		
Freshmen	67.61	32.39
Sophomores	52.68	47.32
Juniors	70.48	29.52
Seniors	67.69	32.31
Purposely put books or journals on the wrong shelf in the library or cut out articles so other students couldn't find them.*		
Freshmen	87.32	12.68
Sophomores	74.11	25.89
Juniors	82.86	17.14
Seniors	90.00	10.00
Obtained an unauthorized copy of an exam before taking it.***		
Freshmen	95.77	4.23

Sophomores	92.79	7.21
Juniors	77.14	22.86
Seniors	79.23	20.77

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Table 4

Significant chi-squares by academic college (major).

	%	
Survey item	Never	Once or more
Worked on homework with others when the instructor expects you to work on your own.**		
Arts & Sciences	46.47 %	53.53 %
Business	28.09	71.91
Per. & Visual Arts	58.82	41.18
Health & Human Sciences	53.26	46.74
Copied another student's coursework *with* his/her knowledge.*		
Arts & Sciences	48.82	51.18
Business	44.94	55.06
Per. & Visual Arts	58.82	41.18
Health & Human Sciences	63.04	36.96
Made up an excuse to avoid handing in a term paper or taking a test on time.*		
Arts & Sciences	64.71	35.29
Business	71.91	28.09
Per. & Visual Arts	47.06	52.94
Health & Human Sciences	76.09	23.91

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Table 5

Significant chi-squares by age.

	%	
Survey item	Never	Once or more
Arranged to sit next to someone in order to copy from his/her exam.*		
18 - 19	81.98 %	18.02 %
20 - 21	75.71	24.29
22 - 23	82.76	17.24
24 - 25	100.00	0.00
>25	92.59	7.41
Added a few made-up items to a bibliography.**		
18 - 19	51.35	48.65
20 - 21	55.93	44.07
22 - 23	58.62	41.38
24 - 25	71.43	28.57
> 25	88.89	11.11
Obtained an unauthorized copy of an exam before taking it.**		
18 - 19	95.50	4.50
20 - 21	81.82	18.18
22 - 23	78.16	21.84
24 - 25	90.48	9.52
> 25	85.19	14.81

Copied another student's coursework *with* his/her knowledge.***		
18 - 19	37.84	62.16
20 - 21	46.89	53.11
22 - 23	55.17	44.83
24 - 25	85.71	14.29
> 25	77.78	22.22

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

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Printed Name: Patty Roberts, Janet Anderson Paula Gravish	Organization: University of Northern Colorado
Address: 809 19th St, Apt #45 Greeley, CO 80631	Telephone Number: (970) 351-4810
	Date: 10/2/97

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